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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 021220

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, IO, ISN

E.O. 12958: DECL: AFTER KOREAN REUNIFICATION  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MNUC](#) [CH](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [JA](#) [RU](#)  
SUBJECT: DPRK NUCLEAR TEST THREAT: VIEWS OF CHINESE  
ACADEMIC AND MEDIA OBSERVERS

REF: BEIJING 20988

Classified By:  
Classified by Political Minister Counselor Daniel  
Shields. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (S) Chinese academic and media observers are concerned about North Korea's threat to conduct a nuclear test and generally believe the DPRK will actually carry out its threat to test at some point. Some observers expressed skepticism that a test would come soon. The official China Daily ran on October 7 an AP report quoting Li Dunqiu of China's State Council Development Research Center as commenting that a North Korean nuclear test is "unavoidable" unless the United States eases tensions by removing "sanctions." Embassy contacts told us China is angry and frustrated with the DPRK, but "unable" to renounce its traditional friendly ties to the North. Contacts who were willing to discuss possible Chinese reactions to a North Korean test said that China would work more closely with the United States in the aftermath of any such test. One contact predicted tht China would not veto a post-test resolution calling for sanctions against the DPRK, but would abstain. End Summary.

2. (S) Official Chinese media coverage of the DPRK's October 3 statement threatening a nuclear test focused on Beijing's efforts to urge restraint by Pyongyang, although at least two prominent Chinese DPRK scholars have been quoted as stating that the DPRK will actually implement at some point its decision to carry out a nuclear test. Beijing's official English-language newspaper China Daily carried an AP article on October 7 quoting State Council Development Research Center scholar Li Dunqiu as stating that, "North Korea has already made a decision to carry out a test ... but if the United States removes sanctions...then tensions can be eased. Otherwise launching a nuclear test is unavoidable for North Korea." Shanghai's Oriental Morning Post quoted Central Party School DPRK expert Zhang Liangui on October 4 as indicating that "since the DPRK has made development of nuclear weapons its policy, a nuclear test is certain to happen and it is only a matter of

time."" Comment: Embassy contacts indicate that strict guidance has been issued to Chinese media outlets (see below) prohibiting reporting on the DPRK issue outside of official Xinhua agency releases. Publication of comments by authoritative scholars outside of the Xinhua rubric is therefore significant. End Comment.

¶3. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX (strictly protect) told poloff on October 7 that he believes it unlikely that the DPRK will conduct a nuclear test soon. He acknowledged that he had heard speculation about a test being conducted on either October 8 or October 10, but said he thinks the North Korean statement of October 3 suggests that the test will not be conducted in the near future. Kim Jong-Il might now wait to see whether the statement itself would bring any result before moving to a test, he said.

¶4. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX (strictly protect) said he XXXXXXXXXXXXX was not up to speed on the DPRK situation as of October 7. He cited U.S. researcher Selig Harrison's statement at a September 28 lecture in Washington that the DPRK is looking for a "package deal" and commented that the DPRK is "posturing." He said he would be attending official meetings on the issue in the next few days.

¶5. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX (strictly protect), just returned from XXXXXXXXXXXXX said China is very concerned about a possible DPRK nuclear test and argued that the ramifications of a test are even worse for China than for the United States. China is caught in a terrible bind, he said, unable to renounce its traditional friendly relations with North Korea and unable to influence the DPRK's actions.

Focus on Abe  
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¶6. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX (strictly protect) told poloff on October 7 that the biggest event in the next few days, despite the DPRK's statement and the opening of the Party's 6th Plenum on October 8, would be the visit to China of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on October 8-9. Many of XXXXXXXXXXXXX's colleagues and friends in media and official circles regard the announcement of Abe's visit as quite sudden, but all see the visit as positive. China will be Abe's first overseas visit as Premier, even before a visit to Washington, XXXXXXXXXXXXX observed, and Beijing sees this as highly significant. China's top leaders are well-disposed to Japan, regard the relationship as crucial to China's development and have been looking for a way to get around the history impasse and move forward, he said.

¶7. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXX noted that the Abe trip was put together before the DPRK's announced its intent to conduct a nuclear test and is not connected to the situation in the DPRK. He said, however, that Chinese leaders and Abe would discuss the DPRK during their talks, particularly in light of the DPRK statement. XXXXXXXXXXXXX said that they would also discuss Iran, as both China and Japan have major economic interests in Iran.

Test Will Push China to Cooperate  
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¶8. (S) On the issue of potential reaction in China to a DPRK nuclear test, XXXXXXXXXXXXX said he had heard discussion that there could be a test on October 8. In the event of a test, XXXXXXXXXXXXX said he expects that China would move to cooperate more closely with the United States in the UN Security Council with regard to the DPRK issue. While he predicted that China would not cast a vote in support of sanctions against the DPRK, he judged that China would abstain. This would be a "major shift,"

XXXXXXXXXXXX stated. Previously, China would certainly have vetoed any DPRK sanctions resolution, he stated.

¶9. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXX expressed some frustration that China continues to feel obliged to support the DPRK out of ""traditional ideological ties"" when China's interests ""clearly dictate"" that it should be tougher on the DPRK than on Iran, for example. ""The DPRK is a rogue state and everyone knows it,"" XXXXXXXXXXXX said. ""But China is unable to renounce its special relationship with the DPRK.""

¶10. (S) Any North Korean nuclear test will prompt the Chinese government to work more closely with the United States on North Korea issues both bilaterally and at the United Nations, predicted XXXXXXXXXXXX. XXXXXXXXXXXX He related that in meetings, DPRK officials were ""almost impossible to communicate with."" He was surprised, he recalled, at how much they complained about hina. China's vote in favor of UN Security Council Resolution 1695, which condemned the North Korean missile launches on July 4-5, caused particular consternation, XXXXXXXXXXXX said.

#### Media Restrictions Issued -----

¶11. (S) The Propaganda Department has issued strict guidelines ordering all media outlets to publish only state-run Xinhua News Service wire copy, said XXXXXXXXXXXX. XXXXXXXXXXXX added that frustration reigns among scholars and think-tankers he has spoken with about the North Korea situation. The July 4-5 missile launches and the October 3 announcement both came as surprises and gave ""hard lessons"" to Chinese foreign policy practitioners, he said. XXXXXXXXXXXX related that there is considerable official anger at the DPRK for undermining the Six-Party Talks process, on which China has staked its reputation. In fact, XXXXXXXXXXXX said leading foreign policy scholars plan to hold an urgent meeting this week in Shanghai to discuss recommendations for China's leadership on how to handle the North Korea nuclear issue. ""There is a feeling that we are at a crossroads,"" he said.

#### Chinese Public Opinion Shifting on North Korea -----

¶12. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXX, told poll on October 7 that support for North Korea as the country ""most friendly"" to China has slipped to 32 percent from over 50 percent five years ago. (Note: North Korea was nevertheless the number two friendliest country in 2006 polls, following Russia.) XXXXXXXXXXXX cautioned that most Chinese do not think much about North Korea, so polling results should be viewed cautiously. However, he noted that 30 percent of those polled in 2006 said they viewed the DPRK as a threat to China and XXXXXXXXXXXX predicted that, if the DPRK conducts a nuclear test, this number would increase.

¶13. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXX said he has been monitoring Internet chat rooms and he has been struck by Chinese netizens' cool reaction to North Korea's test plans. A primary concern in Internet forums is where the test might take place, with many worrying that the site will be close to Chinese territory. Although there is a strong emotional bond still exists between the two countries because of the Korean War, public sympathy toward North Korea is deteriorating. ""People are all very disappointed,"" XXXXXXXXXXXX observed.  
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